



WORLD FORUM
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What Difference Did You Make Today?

by Karen Graham • Reflection by Ellen Hall

The Association for Childhood Education's Institute (ACEI) for Education Diplomacy in Washington, DC (April 2013), provided a window of opportunity to showcase the work of the World Forum Working Group on Children's Rights.

Founded in 2012, the Working Group on Children's Rights is working diligently, at a seemingly ever-increasing pace, to promote children's rights across the globe. The ambition of the Working Group on Children's Rights (Group) is to use education and provocation to mobilise individuals, groups, and governments to make small, sustainable step changes that impact positively on the lives of young children.

To achieve this mission the Group actively seeks multiple perspectives on themes that are identified as the priorities of the Group. The overarching aim is to engage in, and to promote, research and practice that brings about culturally and contextually appropriate improve-

ments in services to children. It is an ambitious challenge that benefits from the support of the World Forum community.

Publicising the actions and ambitions of the Group, presenters Karen Graham, Angela Fowler, and Edna Ranck were delighted to engage in discussions with students, practitioners, and researchers who were keen to find out more about the work of the Working

Group on Children's Rights and the World Forum Foundation.

Responses to discussions that took place during the Poster Session were positive and encouraging. The Group's determination to "breathe life into policy and practice to preserve the child's right to survival, development, participation, and protection" was regarded as a powerful and exciting mission.



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Throughout discussions two consistent and inter-related themes emerged:

1. The perception that success of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) would be measured solely by the number of nations that ratified the UNCRC.
2. The contribution that an individual practitioner could make was regarded as likely to be too small to have impact.

The Group challenged these perspectives in the belief that all contributions are significant. Indeed, the Group promotes the belief that the complementary and combined efforts of all stakeholders, at all levels, offers the greatest possibility of realising positive outcomes for children. Accepting that Governments have the potential for the greatest influence, the Group believes that the potential for greatest impact is at the frontline level where

implementation of policy directly impacts on the lives of children.

If, as point one suggests, ratification of the UNCRC itself were the single end goal we may be missing an important reality. While the UNCRC is undoubtedly a powerful tool for improvement, in those nations yet to ratify the UNCRC, the workforce can still wield considerable influence and have impact at local levels by adopting the principles of the UNCRC where possible. The workforce, across all nations, has the opportunity to make a positive difference to children's lives by responding sensitively to children, promoting and influencing best practice, and by engaging and encouraging communities to adopt the principles of the UNCRC.

Clearly, an effective workforce needs to be confident in its ability to contribute positively to the lives of children today while lobbying continues to encourage all nations to ratify the

UNCRC, drawing together the combined influence of national policy and practice, to improve the lives of children tomorrow. It was, therefore, disappointing to hear research students doubting the value of their individual and combined contributions, feeling disempowered, because they lived in a nation yet to ratify the UNCRC.

While we were pleased to note that engagement in discussion resulted in a renewed sense of empowerment for these students, the learning we gained as presenters was that we must protect the children's workforce from feeling that their contribution is diminished or indeed, increased, only as a result of their current political context. The political environment may at best promote, or at worst demote, children's rights; but neither will detract from the importance of the quality of daily interactions with, or on behalf of, children.

It was a positive end to a positive session that resulted in:

- increased interest in the work of the World Forum Working Group on Children's Rights.
- interest from attendees in contributing to the efforts of the Working Group on Children's Rights.
- interest in attendance at the World Forum in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 2014.

As we look forward to 2014, we note that, to date, 193 nations have ratified the UNCRC; of the three that have not, one has had no central government for years and one is a very new nation. This paints a picture of success; the majority of nations have committed to investing in a shared vision for children's rights. As we continue in our efforts to secure ratification of the UNCRC by the final three nations,

we can, as a global workforce across 196 nations, commit to engagement with those same principles and bring the promises within UNCRC to life.

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Together, every day,
we can make a difference
across every nation.

What difference
did you
make today?



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Reflections on Our First Year by Ellen Hall

In June 2012, OMEP-Norway and the American College of Norway in Moss hosted 19 educators representing eight countries, who traveled to Moss to take part in the World Forum Foundation's first Global Working Initiative on Children's Rights. Some came because of the excitement generated during the Children's Rights sessions at World Forum 2011. Others, new to the work, came at the request of colleagues. All brought a passion for children's rights and a commitment to listening and learning about the work of children's rights' advocates in international contexts.

As with all World Forum Foundation initiatives, the work was at the same time intense and energizing. Shared experiences, thoughts, and ideas among people from diverse backgrounds created a strong bond among us. Questions permeated our meetings during the four days we were together in Moss:

- Could we create a World Forum Working Group on Children's Rights, and if so, what would be our mission?
- How would our mission support that of the World Forum Foundation?
- What would our work be, and who would do this work?
- Could we make a difference, and if so, in what ways?

The conversations that emerged as we struggled with these questions led to the development of a mission statement:

The mission of the World Forum Working Group on Children's Rights is to gather, study, discuss, and disseminate information about the multiple perspectives on children's rights in every country. We envision a world in which all children have their needs provided for, are protected from tokenism and exploitation, and can actively participate in their families, communities, and nations.

One of the strongest threads, woven through our ongoing dialogues, was the desire to include the voices of both children and adults in our work. To this end, we are producing a documentary film that asks young children in schools worldwide to tell us — through art, movement, and words — what they need to feel loved, safe, and respected. Children's ideas will be captured in physical and digital murals. The documentary will be distributed worldwide, to people and organizations that play important roles in children's lives.

We are also creating an interactive page on the World Forum Foundation website that will serve as a springboard for conversations. We are interested in:

- taking on the role of provocateur.
- focusing on the multiplicity of perspectives and the complexities of the work surrounding children's rights to provision, protection, and participation in diverse cultural contexts.
- writing and encouraging others to write articles designed to change the discourse at the academic level.
- facilitating panel discussions at World Forum 2014.
- organizing poster sessions, such as the one delivered at the ACEI Institute for Global Education Diplomacy in April of this year (see adjacent article)

The first year of the World Forum Working Group on Children's Rights has been one of organization and accomplishments. As we prepare for World Forum 2014, we invite you to join this Working Group. We need your voices to make a difference. Bring your energy and enthusiasm for the work and bring your ideas. Go to:

www.worldforumfoundation.org/working-groups/childrensrights/

